

# Germany announces end to most COVID restrictions on March 20

February 16 2022, by Geir Moulson

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German Chancellor Olaf Scholz addressed the media after a meeting with the federal state governors on measures to battle the coronavirus pandemic at the chancellery in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022. Credit: Michele Tantussi/Pool via AP

Germany's leaders on Wednesday announced plans to end most of the

country's coronavirus restrictions by March 20, a decision that coincided with moves by neighboring Austria and Switzerland to drop many of their curbs sooner.

A three-step plan was endorsed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the country's 16 state governors as official figures show Germany's COVID-19 infection rate beginning to drift downward.

"The peak has now probably been reached," Scholz said, adding that "a constantly improved situation" can be expected in the coming weeks.

The easing is to start with scrapping rules that [prevented people](#) without proof of vaccination or recovery from visiting nonessential stores and the lifting of limits on private gatherings of vaccinated people.

Beginning on March 4, requirements to enter restaurants and bars will be relaxed, with a negative test sufficing rather than, as in many areas at present, proof of vaccination or recovery plus a test or a booster shot. Nightclubs will be allowed to reopen, albeit with entry restrictions.

And "all far-reaching protective measures" are to be dropped on March 20 "if the situation in hospitals allows," according to Wednesday's decision. An obligation to allow people to work from home will be dropped as well. But Scholz said that mask-wearing and distancing requirements will remain in place.



People present their vaccination status as they queue in front of the famous department store 'KaDeWe' (Department Store Of The West) in Berlin, Germany, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2021. Chancellor Olaf Scholz is conferring with Germany's 16 state governors Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022 to map a way out of coronavirus restrictions as official figures show new infections beginning to drift downward. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Sohn,file

Germany saw infections caused by the highly contagious omicron variant surge later than in several other European countries. Officials have attributed this to the restrictions that have been in place since December.

But other countries, including neighboring Denmark, also have moved faster to lift restrictions, and there have been growing calls for Germany to follow suit. Earlier Wednesday, [Austria](#) announced that it will drop

most of its restrictions on March 5 and Switzerland said most of its curbs will go this week.

Germany's national disease control center has reported several days of slight drops in the country's infection rate, though it remains far above pre-omicron levels.

As Germany moves toward easing its latest restrictions, prospects of a vaccine mandate for all adults appear to be receding. Scholz came out in favor of such a mandate just before he became chancellor in December, but his three-party coalition is divided on the issue and he left it to parliament to come up with proposals.



A doctor vaccinates an employee of MKT Krankentransport OHG in a mobile vaccination station at Wettersteinplatz in Munich, Germany, Monday, Feb. 14,

2022. Mobile vaccination station change the location in the city every day and offer vaccination against the coronavirus to citizen. Credit: Sven Hoppe/dpa via AP



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz lifts a thumb prior to the weekly Cabinet meeting at the Chancellery in Berlin, Germany, Wednesday, Feb. 16, 2022. Credit: Kay Nietfeld/DPA via AP, Pool

At present, it's unclear when lawmakers will vote on legislation and what if any kind of mandate would muster a majority. Scholz pressed for lawmakers to find a solution.

"We must not forget the next fall and winter, and so it is still right not just to advocate vaccination but to prepare the legislative measures for a general vaccine mandate," he said. "It will be necessary when the weather gets colder, when the days get darker and when infections could increase again."

Even already-approved legislation requiring [health workers](#) to present proof of vaccination or recovery by mid-March has run into difficulties, although Germany's highest court last week refused to temporarily block its implementation.

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Citation: Germany announces end to most COVID restrictions on March 20 (2022, February 16) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-02-germany-covid-restrictions.html>

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